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ABSTRACT

The benefits of relationships between corporations and universities are examined, noting the economic benefit to both. Corporations like to see research and graduates that will increase company earnings, and this notion of benefits is often acknowledged by universities and corporations alike. However, there is much more involved. The tension between processes of institutional self-definition and market demand is great, and the public debate over the core curriculum is driven by different notions of who the people are, how they organize themselves, and why they do what they do. America has a vertically hierarchial and mechanistic view of the world, with a focus on discrete products and their profit, and academic institutions have been influenced by this metaphor. It is important to realize that just as a corporation is more than its product and profit, a university is more than the books, articles, plays, music, and people it produces. Science must be driven by more than funding sources, and university endowments must depend on more than good economic investments and profits. This self-conscious process might leave them freer to concentrate on formulating "ethics of ends" about what is true, good, just, and beautiful. Corporate support of academic research today is fraught with ethical issues. Students must be encouraged to risk clear communication, develop broad-ranging conceptual skills for making meaning of information, be creative and seek surprise in all facets of living, and employ self-conscious ways of testing a reality against others. Contains 10 references. (SM)

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# The Benefits of Corporate-University Partnerships

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A paper presented at the Annual Meeting of
The Association for the Study of Higher Education

November 5, 1988

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This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Adam's Mark Hotel in St. Louis, Missouri, November 3-6, 1988. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

What are the benefits of relationships between corporations and universities? The most immediate thing that comes to mind involves the economic benefit to both. Universities like to receive funding or materials from corporations. Corporations like to see research and graduates that will increase company earnings. This particular notion of "benefits" represents a prevalent bottom-line orientation taken by universities and corporations alike. Yet there is much more to the exchange.

As social institutions, the very image of who we are, how we organize ourselves, and why we do what we do is bound up in the relationships we cultivate and maintain. The fact that we live in an age of rapid change makes decisions about productive relationships all the more difficult. The choices are many and the familiar signs few to guide behavior.

Moreover, we live at the turning of an era whose passage suggests a turning of values as well. What do we value in this new, so-called information age and how do we make our behaviors reflect our values. What is ethical in other words?

In the university, the discussion of the "core" curriculum resonates with ethical overtones. In a recent article in Change magazine, Barry Werth suggested that most colleges and universities exhibit somewhat anxious behavior about their sense of primary mission and goals. The tension between processes of institutional self-definition and market demand is great. Similarly, the public debate over the "core" curriculum is driven by different notions of who we as a people are, how we organize ourselves, and why we do what we do.

The age from which we are supposedly exiting has left us with powerful organizing metaphors. The principle economic resources that contributed to the bottom line in the industrial age of our recent past were capital, labor,

and raw materials. We created top-down organizations with large bureaucracies to make industry work. We invented the company man without an individual identity. This vertically hierarchical and mechanistic view of the world placed the United States at the top of a global economic pyramid. The focus was on discrete products and the profit therefrom, by-products of an industrial process.

Academic institutions have been influenced by this metaphor as well. Theory and academic organization also shifted attention to elite specialists and areas of expertise and to outcomes and effects. From one perspective, academe and industry long ago fixed sights on the several bottom lines of the age.

Perhaps, part of the contemporary confusion could be called a bottom line dilemma. Just as a corporation is more than its product and profit, so also are universities more than the books, articles, plays, music, and yes graduates, faculty and staff that it "produces." Admissions deans should be evaluated on more than their yield of freshman, athletic directors on more than games won and lost; academics on more than articles published, grants contracted, students taught, and speeches given, and fund raisers more than on dollars raised — if we truly value more than the bottom line.

Science must be driven by more than funding sources. University endowments must depend on more than good economic investments and the "profits" from auxiliary enterprises. To repeat, this bottom line dilemma is a well-known marker of an age when narrow focus and elite specialization were deemed necessary to push back the frontiers of knowledge. While seeming to be a practical approach to dealing with a vaste universe of knowledge, foci too

narrowly maintained can become enormously impractical over time. Sight of the forest is lost for view of a few trees.

One of the more critical tasks for corporations and universities in the next century will be to glimpse the forest and then align values according to the view. Rene Dubos reminds us that universities have traditionally used exacting ethical standards to evaluate their means of inquiry. These "ethics of means" are founded on notions of intellectual integrity and open-mindedness. Using highly developed and tested systems, we simultaneously evaluate the manner in which we investigate as well as the mode of investigation. Complex though these "ethics of means" are across disciplines and areas of study, they function nevertheless as trees in a larger forest.

Bottom lines provide a means to an end also. As such, many of the standards used to arrive appropriately at a desired bottom line are "ethics of means." At the risk of oversimplification, the focus of the industrial age on products, profits, bottom lines and specialization encouraged the people to overlook the forest for the temporary convenience of gazing on discretely defined trees. Worse yet, the values supporting this partitioned view militated against ever seeing the forest, as evaluation and reward systems favored trees. Even the language of the industrial age corporate and academic marketplace resonates with bottom line notions of success or failure, winning or losing, us or them, profit or loss. This language trains the eyes and ears to the effects or by-products of a working process, fostering dualistic thinking and the artificial separation of products, producers, and process. Academe's penchant for objectivism further encourages this view of the world.

Corporate leaders look to universities today, saying that they need people who are educated to make new discoveries, who will unlock new ways of learning on an organizational and individual scale. John Sculley, CEO of Apple Computer, has suggested that the information age in which we are living requires knowledge, individual innovators and information as grist for it's mill rather than the capital, labor, and raw materials used in the industrial age. Further, he says that the processes of exchange and of re-combination among parts of our world-wide economic, social, political, and cultural systems are interdependent. We participate in a global economy as producer, product, and process. We are the marketplace even as we come to buy and sell.

Unfortunately, our current mode of buying and selling has created enormous debt — individual and organizational. Perhaps the artificial disassociation of the past age allowed people in the United States, for example, to become comfortable with such debt, so long as it seemed not to touch lives directly and the semblance of being "on top" of things persisted. Sculley suggests that "[w]e are no longer creating enough value to sustain our lifestyle, and we are falling deeper into debt. There is a compelling need," he says "to continue to create value in the world." More importantly, individuals make the discoveries that provide innovation just as individuals also decide how, when and why "to create value," in the broadest sense of the phase.

The ethical implications of the information age will be significant, if the individuals in corporations and universities do make a shift to creating value anew. Other ages have known and realized enlightenments. Lewis Thomas reminds us that "[s]cience, especially twentieth century science, has provided us with a glimpse of something we never really knew before, the revelation of

human ignorance." Thus, our passage into the information age could transform a be-smogged era into one of clearer, cleaner light. The thought is provocative and on many lips.

Learning is at the heart of the effort. The most powerful response to cloying ignorance is to place a high value on learning more while knowing less. Humility is the first step to creating value anew.

What does that mean for corporate-university relationships? Initially it means that each needs to shore up the emotional integrity that underpins the intellectual integrity called for. Each must acknowledge limitations, acknowledge that answers are fleeting responses, confess to the subjectivity of choices, of "educated" guesses, and personally seek a fit with other living things. Such a self-conscious process might leave everyone freer to concentrate on formulating "ethics of ends," as Rene DuBos suggests we must.

Such ethics of ends will address ideas about what is good, true, just, beautiful, healthy, loving and about what one's civic responsibility might be in relation to certain ends. Some notions of such ends need to inform our already well-developed ethics of means. Just as an act has no significance unless we know the person who is acting, so the fullness of our motives cannot be divorced from the results of what we do. Our motives, means, and ends need to complement each other. When acquiring knowledge becomes the self-conscious making of relevant distinctions in interdependent relation to a living environment, learning or evolutionary change becomes an integral, highly personal and creative part of each of us. This is, however, the riskiest of undertakings and has little chance of success unless those who attempt it find support for their inquiry in the "real world."

This is where the nature of our corporate-university relationships is extremely important. Corporate support of academic research today is fraught with ethical issues. The line between a business expense and philanthropy has blurred in recent years as research funds are more readily available for the projects that best feed a company's commercial interests. Chairs are more readily endowed where they reflect company policy. Fritjof Capra has observed that "corporate and business leaders are prominent on the boards of academic institutions and foundations, where they use their influence to perpetuate a value system consistent with corporate interests." Moreover, increased competition among universities for the support of the non-profit sector and for pre-eminence in the profit and non-profit sector have made ethical questions ever more troublesome these days.

The arms race, the space race, the research and publication race, the institutional or organizational race, the race for more students, the credentialing race, even the rat race, all have a familiar ring to them. Each appears to have a life of its own. In effect, each phenomenon represents a strikingly similar view of the world and the conventional expression of that view of the world. According to this convention, races are won or lost. Scores are kept; someone's score is up while another's is down. The only things that change with each succeeding race are the scores and the winners. It's hard to remember all the winners, much less the scores. We invent other games with different, but similar sounding rules when we grow bored or restless; but our notions about winning and losing remain the same. We say that we like winners. We aggressively pursue the win. We continue to focus on, indeed invest ourselves in the results of a process and not on what we are

actively doing and why and how we're doing it. We repeatedly neglect the context of the race.

Do we know what we are doing and why? Once again, we must acknowledge that where the human condition is concerned, we know that we don't know much. For example, there are things swimming inside our cells, providing all the energy for living that are basically foreign creatures, brought in for symbiotic living eons ago, the lineal descendants of bacteria. Lewis Thomas says, "We do not have the ghost of an idea how they got there, where they came from, or how they evolved to their present structure..." Indeed, the Earth's life is a system of interacting, interdependent things and we do not have the foggiest notion how it all regulates and balances itself, each thing by its own life and the living of that life... or what it means. We're not sure whether E flat sounds the same in everyone's ear or whether red looks the same in each person's eyes. There are surprises in store whenever we listen to someone else's view of the world. It is in fact an enlightening experience to hear the similarities and differences in people's views of the world.

Given the notion that surprise more than likely awaits us in the future, the most productive corporate-university relationship might be one in which both invest in surprise, in the improbable and in the unpredictable. Unfortunately, most people like to invest in a reasonably sure thing. Yet we say that we need new ideas, fresh avenues, innovative talent. Moving in the direction of the truly innovative is risky business as it runs against convention to invest in uncontrollable processes. Yet, it is interesting to remember that many entrepreneurial ventures and illuminating academic hypotheses were born of educated guesses by people who also risked listening to their instincts and ventured into the unknown.

Reason maintains the conventional equilibrium, while truly new ideas spring from the unconventional. Forging really new ideas seems to require a kind of passion. Perhaps passion and reason can be wed only by unconventional, highly individualized means. The academic convention is that reason should rule passion. A more reasonable approach for this age might involve an impassioned pursuit of seeing how our educated guesses measure up in this delicately balanced universe. Each of us may need to have a passion about testing errors in our view of the world. The paradox of mind studying itself will keep us eternally surprised.

There is an illuminating example of such commitment in Mitchell Feigenbaum's struggle to pursue his theoretical work on chaos. Sure that there must be others who, like himself, passionately sought explanation of principles of color and light, Feigenbaum sought out the works of Romantics like Goethe to inform his thinking (rather than Newton, whom Feigenbaum already knew well from his traditional, linear training in math and physics). Sure enough, he found that Goethe had conducted his own brand of extensive research on color and light, which was holistic and non-linear as contrasted with Newton's reductionist approach. Feigenbaum discovered that "[I]t was the perception of color, to Goethe, that was universal and objective. [In other words, W]hat scientific evidence was there for a definable real-world quality of redness independent of our perception." In uncovering this insight, Feigenbaum was next able to ask himself about non-linear mathematical formalisms that might correspond to human perception and, in turn, to a perception of universal qualities. More importantly, he thought that "to understand how the human mind sorts through the chaos of perception, surely one would need to understand how disorder can produce universality."

Such notions foreshadow our stated contemporary needs for more people learning how to learn anew and to create value afresh. This particular idea of individual learning smacks of chaos, to be sure. Yet chaotic individual differences in learning are ubiquitous, even as they inform the order of the universe. To acknowledge such a notion and engage its accompanying perspective could prove enlightening.

The pedagogical needs for such an effort are equally chaotic. Realizing those needs, however, creates value anew. Thus it seems critical to the health of this new age that students of all kinds be encouraged in the following pursuits:

- to acquire self-knowledge of form, substance, and process in a subject area through empathic guidance;
- to develop broad ranging conceptual skills for making meaning of information;
- to employ self-conscious ways of testing a reality against others;
- to be creative and to seek surprise in all facets of living;
- to realize the rewards of cooperation, collaboration, and self-competition;
- to risk clear communication;
- to revel in the ability to contribute to learning who we are, how we organize ourselves, and why we do what we do.

In this view, the "real world" exists in each of us in the university even as we inform the corporate marketplace, the reverse being equally true. To continue to have the university function in our minds as training for life is to separate learning from life arbitrarily and to perpetuate an era of disconnectedness that wants to be finished.

Change is with us like it or not. Whether the shifts taking place in the 1980's and 90's will be healthy is the question. Catharine Stimpson says that for universities, the several thrusts of the curriculum debate over notions of cultural literacy signal where people are in this metamorphosis. She characterizes the groups that are offering commentary on education and democracy in four ways: 1) The Radical Right, who swear allegiance to a sacred text; 2) the Neo-Conservatives who believe in a tradition of "Great Books," "universal values" and "universal truths;" 3) the Sober Observers who justify education because it makes democratic America more economically secure; and 4) the Reconstructionists who marvel in culture's fertility and capacity for change, who believe that "truth" is at best a composite of "truths," and who value the ability to read the representational maps of past and present societies, knowing also what went into making the maps.

Stimpson further opts for a curriculum that "seems to growl like a beast of relativism... [For r]elativism demands the capacity for knowledgeably comparing things and then for dwelling with their differences. That entails the unrobing of the overdressed ego and placing it within numerous networks of relationships." Many argue that such a stance invites chaos. Yet if we remember, in the words of John Gleick, that chaos is another kind of order and is ubiquitous, then a perceptual change will be launched. New orders will follow.

One mind-boggling product of such a shift is the notion that in a finite, earthly playground an infinite number of games can be played. James Carse says that there are essentially two kinds of games that people play — the finite games played to be won or lost, and the infinite games played for the playing. In this light, choices for prudent investments in learning take on

an interesting dimension. Either the individuals involved risk engaging infinite and universal ends through thoughtful recombinations of finite means. Or they settle for struggling with finite means, with no ends to gain. The ethical implications of such a choice for corporate-university partnerships are enormous.

The technology of this age already allows us to make instant choices about combining content with organization. In other words, we don't have to follow predetermined organizing schemes to search for information. Content and organization can serve as complementary means to the end of a meaning-filled fit with the universe. And this is only John Sculley's view of the possibilities that computerization allows. There are other realities out there to be understood whose "resonances," to borrow Rupert Sheldrake's use of the word, signal improbable, unexpected, and infinite universals.

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